



ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ ASEAN Peoples' Forum 2017

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ASEAN CSOs march against human rights abuses and inequitable development; demand Heads of State to put social dimension to regional integration

On the first day of the 31st ASEAN Summit Heads of State, hundreds of representatives of civil society and social movements across Southeast Asia participating in the parallel ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum marched to the People Power Monument today to protest the human rights atrocities, breakdown of the rule of law and unjust and inequitable economic policies in the region. They pushed for transformative changes in the ASEAN and demanded for a social dimension in the ASEAN economic integration.

SreySotheavy, Executive Director of the Alliance for Conflict Transformation Organization in Cambodia pointed out the need to review the non-interference policy of the ASEAN, which she says "has served as an excuse for ASEAN governments to remain silent on human rights violations of authoritarian governments."

"The ASEAN virtually condone these brutal acts as they hide behind the shield of 'non-interference,'" said JelenPaclarin, Chair of the ACSC/APF Regional Steering Committee.

Paclarin saw the "crucial need to reform ASEAN's decision-making processes" as she noted that "the non-interference policy blocks ASEAN to seriously address issues on the ground."

"ASEAN must respond to and act on the various human rights violations in the region," said SunsaneeSutthisunsanee of Pro-Rights Foundation in Thailand. She also stressed that the ASEAN must engage more with the people and civil society.

"When it comes to decision-making, ASEAN should consult with the people and civil society before adopting a treaty or an instrument because this impacts on the people." She emphasized the need for the "participation of peoples in the monitoring of the implementation of the ASEAN blueprint."

Meanwhile, Soe Min Than of Singapore, who is among the organizers and host of next year's ACSC/APF in Singapore said they "envision a region where all stakeholders can openly engage and work on the issue of human rights and social concerns to allow greater collaboration, better and more sustainable solutions."

He said the ASEAN member states' current emphasis on the ASEAN Economic Community "does not include issues which affect marginalized communities and groups to ensure that they are not left behind." According to him, the ASEAN "should ensure that policies are grounded in regular consultation with all stakeholders to push towards greater economic prosperity."

Jane Aileen of Indonesia Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) hopes to see an ASEAN that "embraces everyone without any discrimination, preserves the culture and local languages, protects the environment and empowers people."

YasintaLujina of Timor Leste hopes her country becomes a member of ASEAN. She said she envisions "an ASEAN that respects human rights, human dignity and the contribution of peoples organizations and their indispensable participation." She further said that the "ASEAN should be a region that is safe for everyone."

The march rally concludes the four-day ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples Forum that brought together people's organizations, social movements and NGOs of youth, children, women, workers, older people, indigenous groups, persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ and other sectors, including academics from the ten (10) ASEAN countries plus East Timor. The delegates substantially discussed issues on human rights and access to justice, corporate greed and power, labor mobility and mixed migration, decent work, transformative social protection and life of dignity for all, peace and human security.

The delegates vowed to forge stronger alliances, continuously engage the ASEAN and push for alternative regionalism and practices.